

Does Your Child Need a Booster Seat?

Young children who are placed in vehicle belts rather than booster seats are twice as likely to suffer devastating injuries, including severe damage to the brain, liver, spleen, stomach, and spinal cord. Most children need to use a booster seat until age 10-12 for maximum protection and improved comfort in the car.

Q-My child is eight years old. Isn't she old enough to use a regular safety belt now?

A-No. Vehicle seats and belts are designed for adult bodies. For children who have outgrown a safety seat with a harness, a booster seat is needed to keep the lap belt on the upper thighs and the shoulder belt centered on the shoulder and chest.

Q-How can I tell when my child has outgrown his safety seat?*

A-Children should ride in a safety seat with a complete harness system as long as possible. Most current models fit up to 50 lbs. or more, but some fit only up to 40 lbs. (the weight of an average 4-year-old). Check the weight limit on the labels or in the instruction booklet and make sure the shoulders are at or below the top strap slots.

Q-What about children who outgrow their safety seats before age four?

A-Most 2-year-olds and many 3-year-olds are too immature to sit still in a booster with a lap and shoulder belt, which allows them to lean forward or sideways. Parents should consider getting a larger seat or a harness system for younger or more active children who outgrow their safety seats.*

Q-Why is it important for a child who has outgrown a regular safety seat to use a booster?

A-Older children have a higher rate of injury than younger ones for several reasons. Many of them place the shoulder belt under the arm or behind the back. They tend to ride out of position, either sliding forward to the edge of the vehicle seat or slouching downward. Older children are less likely to be buckled up, perhaps because vehicle seats and belts are not comfortable for them.

Q-What about cars with only lap belts in the back seat?*

A-Never use a booster with only a lap belt! Although two shoulder belts have been required in vehicle back seats since 1989, many families have cars with lap-only belts in the center or older cars with no rear shoulder belts. With the wide variety of products with harnesses certified above 40 lbs. now available, there are excellent options for lap-belt-only locations.

Q-How can I tell when my child is big enough to use the vehicle belt without a booster?

A-It depends on the child's proportions, the shape of the vehicle seat, and where the belts are attached to the vehicle. The shoulder belt should cross the center of the shoulder and chest. The lap portion of the belt should be low and snug, crossing the hip bones or upper thighs. Check that your child's legs are long enough so the knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat. Otherwise, the child will tend to slide forward to the edge of the seat or slouch downward, which can cause the lap belt to ride up too high. Make sure the child sits up straight, with the entire back touching the vehicle seatback, and stays properly seated throughout the trip.

Try the 5-Step Test (www.carseat.org) to find out if your child needs a booster.

***For information about safety seats to fit larger children:**

Go to www.carseat.org > Parents' Corner > Helpful Handouts or call SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A.

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. P.O. Box 553, Altadena, CA 91003 www.carseat.org
310/222-6860, 800/745-SAFE (English) 310/222-6862, 800/747-SANO (Spanish)

This document was developed by SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. and may be reproduced in its entirety.
Important: Call to check if there is a more recent version before reproducing this document.